Cam. d. 692. 2

THE

Folly of Atheism,

And (what is now called) *DEISM*;

Even with respect to the *Present Life*.

A

SERMON

Preached at

Saint Martin's in the Fields,

MARCH the 7th. 169½.

Being the *First* of the Lecture Founded by the Honourable *ROBERT BOYLE*, Esquire.

By *RICHARD BENTLEY*, M.A.

Chaplain to the Right Reverend Father in God,

EDWARD, Lord Bishop of *Worcester*.

The Third Edition.

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To my most Honoured Patrons,

TRUSTEES appointed by the Will of the

Honourable *ROBERT BOYLE*, Esq;

The Right Reverend Father in God, *Thomas*,

Lord Bishop of *Lincoln*,

Sir *Henry Ashurst*, K^t and Baronet.

Sir *John Rotheram*, Serjeant at Law.

John Evelyn, senior, Esquire.

Most Honoured,

GOD *having disposed the Heart of that incomparable Person, the Honourable* Robert Boyle, *Esquire, lately deceased, the Glory of our Nation and Age, whose Charity and Goodness were as universal as his Learning and Fame*; "To "settle an Annual Salary for some Divine or "Preaching Minister, who shall be enjoyned to "perform the Offices following: 1. To preach "Eight Sermons in the Year, for proving the "Christian Religion against notorious Infidels, viz. "*Atheists, Deists, Pagans, Jews and Mahometans*; "not descending to any Controversies that are a-

" mong Christians themselves: These Lectures to " be on the *First Monday* of the respective Months " of *January*, *February*, *March*, *April*, *May*, *September*, " *October*, *November*; in such Church as the " Trustees shall from time to time appoint: 2. To " be assisting to all Companies, and encouraging " them in any Undertaking for propagating the " Christian Religion: 3. To be ready to satisfie " such Real Scruples as any may have concerning " those Matters; and to answer such new Objecti- " ons or Difficulties as may be started, to which " good Answers have not yet been made: *You have been pleased to believe me able in some measure to perfom these Offices, and to command this First Essay to be made publick. I am very sensible of the great Honour, as well as the great Extent and Difficulty of the Task; and shall endeavour to the utmost of my poor ability to answer the religious and generous Design of that Excellent Person, and the good Opinion you have entertained of,*

My most Honoured Patrons,

Your very obliged and humble Servant,

R. *Bentley.*

THE Folly of Atheism, &c.

Psalm XIV. verse 1.

The Fool hath said in his Heart, There is no God; they are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doth good.

I Shall not now make any enquiry about the time and occasion and other circumstances of composing this *Psalm*: nor how it comes to pass, that with very little variation we have it twice over, both here the 14th. and again number the 53d. Not that these and such like are not important considerations in themselves; but that I think them improper now, when we are to argue and expostulate with such persons, as allow no Divine Authority to our Text; and profess no greater, or, it may be they will say, less Veneration for these Sacred Hymns, than for the profane Songs of *Anacreon* or *Horace*. So that although I my self do really believe, that all such as *say in their Hearts, There is no God*, are *foolish* and *corrupt*, both in Understanding and Will; because I see that infinite Wise-

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Wisedom himself has pronounced them to be so: nevertheless this Argument would at present have no force upon these men, till in due time and method we have evinced the sufficient Authority of Holy Scripture. But however there are other Books extant, which they must needs allow of as proper Evidence; even the mighty Volumes of visible Nature, and the everlasting Tables of Right Reason; wherein, if they do not wilfully shut their eyes, they may read their own Folly written by the Finger of God in a much plainer and more terrible Sentence,
Dan. 5. 5. than *Belshazzar*'s was by the Hand upon the Wall.

And as the impious Principles of these persons do preclude any argumentation from the revealed Word of God: so they prevent us also from speaking at present to the second part of the *Text*. The whole verse hath apparently two propositions; the one denoting the *Folly* of Atheism, *The Fool hath said in his Heart, There is no God*: the second declaring the *Corruption* and *Flagitiousness* of Life that naturally attend it, *They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doth good.* Now this latter part to a genuine Atheist is mere *Jargon*, as they love to call it; an empty sound of words without any signification. He allows no Natural Morality, nor any other distinction of Good and Evil, Just and Unjust; than as Human Institution

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and the modes and fashions of various Countries do denominate them. The most Heroical Actions or detestable Villanies are in the nature of the things indifferent to his approbation; if by secrecy they are alike conceal'd from Rewards or Punishments, from Ignominy or Applause. So that till we have proved in its proper place the eternal and essential Difference between Vertue and Vice, we must forbear to urge Atheists with the *Corruption* and *Abominableness* of their Principles. But I presume, the first part of the Text, the *Folly and sottishness of Atheism* (which shall be the subject of this Discourse) will be allowed to come home to their case; since they make such a noisie pretence to Wit and Sagacity: and I believe several of them first engage in that Labyrinth of Nonsence and Folly out of an absurd and prepostrous affectation of seeming Wiser than their Neighbours.

But before I proceed any farther, it will be necessary to clear and vindicate this expression of the *Psalmist*, *The Fool hath said in his Heart*, *There is no God*. For I know not any Interpreters, that will allow it to be spoken of such, as *flatly deny* the Being of God; but of them that believing his Existence, do yet seclude him from directing the Affairs of the World, from observing and judging the Actions of Men. I suppose they might be induced to this, from

from the commonly received notion of an Innate Idea of God, imprinted upon every Soul of Man at their Creation, in Characters that can never be defaced. Whence it will follow, that Speculative Atheism doth subsist only in *our* Speculation; whereas really Human Nature cannot be guilty of the crime: that indeed a few sensual and voluptuous Persons may for a season eclipse this native Light of the Soul; but can never so wholly smother and extinguish it, but that at some lucid intervals it will recover it self again, and shine forth to the conviction of their Conscience. And therefore they believed, that the words would not admit of a strict and rigorous interpretation; but ought to be so temper'd and accommodated to the nature of things, as that they may describe those profane persons; who though they *do not, nor cannot* really doubt *in their hearts* of the *Being* of God, yet do openly deny his *Providence* in the course of their Lives. Now if this be all that is meant by the *Text*, I do not see how we can defend not only the fitness and propriety, but the very truth of the expression. As to that natural and indelible signature of God, which Human Souls in their first Origin are supposed to be stamp'd with, I shall shew at a fitter opportunity, that it is a mistake, and that we have no need of it in our Disputes against Atheism. So that being free from that prejudice, I interpret

terpret the words of the *Text* in the literal acceptation, which will likewiſe take in the Expoſitions of others. For I believe that the Royal Pſalmiſt in this comprehenſive brevity of ſpeech, *There is no God*, hath concluded all the various Forms of Impiety; whether of ſuch as excludes the Deity from governing the World by his Providence, or judging it by his Righteouſneſs, or creating it by his Wiſedom and Power. Becauſe the conſequence and reſult of *all* theſe Opinions is terminated in down-right Atheiſm. For the Divine inſpection into the affairs of the World doth neceſſarily follow from the Nature and Being of God. And he that denies this, doth implicitly deny his Exiſtence: he may acknowledge what he will with his mouth, but *in his heart he hath ſaid, There is no God. A God, therefore a Providence*; was a general argument of vertuous men, and not peculiar to the *Stoicks* alone. And again, *No Providence, therefore no God*; was the moſt plauſible reaſon, and the moſt frequent in the mouths of Atheiſtical men. So that it ſeems to be agreed on all hands, that the Exiſtence of God and his Government of the World do mutually ſuppoſe and imply one another.

There are ſome Infidels among us, that not only disbelieve the *Chriſtian* Religion; but impugn the aſſertion of a *Providence*, of the *Immortality* of the

Soul, of an Universal *Judgment* to come, and of any *Incorporeal* Essence: and yet to avoid the odious name of *Atheists*, would shelter and skreen themselves under a new one of *Deists*, which is not quite so obnoxious. But I think the *Text* hath cut them short, and precluded this subterfuge; in as much as it hath declared, that all such wicked Principles are coincident and all one in the issue with the rankest Atheism: *The Fool*, that doth exempt the affairs of the World from the ordination and disposal of God, *hath said in his heart, There is no God* at all. It was the opinion of many of the Ancients, that *Epicurus* introduced a *Deity* into his Philosophy, not because he was perswaded of his Existence, (for when he had brought him upon the Stage of Nature, he made him only *Muta persona*, and interdicted him from bearing any part in it,) but purely that he might not incurr the offence of the Government. Wherefore he was generally suspected *Verbis reliquisse Deum, re sustulisse*; to have framed on purpose such a contemptible paultry *Hypothesis* about him, as indeed left the Name and Title of God in the World; but nothing of his Nature and Power. Just as a Philosopher of our own age gave a ludicrous and fictitious notion about the *Rest of the Earth*, to evade the hard censure and usage, which *Galileo* had lately met with. For my own part, as I do not

Posidon. apud *Cicer.* *Plutarch.* &c.

Mr. Des Cartes.

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exclude this reaſon from being a grand occaſion of *Epicurus*'s Deiſm; ſo I believe that He and *Democritus* too were compelled to it likewiſe by the neceſſity of their own Syſtems. For ſeeing they explain'd the Phænomena of *Viſion*, *Imagination*, and *Thought* it ſelf, by certain thin fleeces of Atoms, that flow inceſſantly from the ſurfaces of bodies, and by their ſubtilty and fineneſs do penetrate any obſtacle, and yet retain the exact figures and lineaments of the ſeveral bodies from which they proceed; and in this manner inſinuating themſelves into the Eyes, and the Contexture of the Soul, do there produce and excite Senſation and Perception of themſelves: in conſequence therefore of this *Hypotheſis* they were obliged to maintain that we could have no Phantaſie, Idea or Conception of any thing, but what did really ſubſiſt either intire or in its ſeveral parts. Whence it followed, that mankind could have no imagination of *Jupiter* or *Mars*, of *Minerva* or *Iſis*; if there were not actually ſuch Beings in nature to emit thoſe *Effluvia*, which gliding into the Soul muſt beget ſuch an imagination. And thence it was, that thoſe Philoſophers adapted their deſcription of the Deity to the vulgar apprehenſions of thoſe times; Gods and Goddeſſes innumerable, and of all human figure: becauſe otherwiſe the conceptions of mankind about them could not poſſibly be accounted

for from their Phisiology. So that if *Epicurus* and *Democritus* were in earnest about their Philosophy, they did necessarily and really believe the *Existence of the Gods.* But as to the nature and authority of them, they bereaved that *Jupiter* of his Thunder and Majesty, forbidding him to look or peep abroad, so much as to enquire what News in the Infinite Space about him; but to content himself and be happy with an eternal lasiness and dozing, unless some rambling Troops of *Atoms* upon the dissolution of a neighbouring World might chance to awake him. Now because no *Israelite* in the days of the *Psalmist* is likely to have been so curious about natural Knowledge, as to believe the Being of God for such a quaint and airy reason as this, when he he had once boldly denied his Dominion over the World; and seeing that there is not now one Infidel living, so ridiculous as to pretend to solve the Phænomena of *Sight*, *Fancy* or *Cogitation*, by those fleeting superficial films of bodies: I must beg leave to think that the *Fool in the Text* was a thorough confirmed *Atheist*; and that the modern disguised *Deists* do only call themselves so for the former reason of *Epicurus*, to decline the publick odium and resentment of the Magistrate; and do cover the most arrant Atheism under the mask and shadow of a Deity, by which they understand no more than

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ſome eternal inanimate Matter, ſome univerſal Nature, and Soul of the World, void of all ſenſe and cogitation, endued with none at all, much leſs with Infinite Wiſedom and Goodneſs; and therefore in this preſent Diſcourſe they may deſervedly come under that Character which the Text hath given of them, of *Fools that have ſaid in their Hearts, There is no God.*

And now having thus far cleared our way; in the next place we ſhall offer ſome notorious Proofs of the groſs *Folly* and ſtupidity of Atheiſts.

If a Perſon that had a fair Eſtate in reverſion, which in all probability he would ſpeedily be poſſeſs'd of, and of which he might reaſonable promiſe to himſelf a long and happy Enjoyment, ſhould be aſſured by ſome skilfull Phyſician; that in a very ſhort time he would inevitably fall into a Diſeaſe, that would ſo totally deprive him of his Underſtanding and Memory, that he ſhould loſe the knowledge of all things without him, nay all conſciouſneſs and ſence of his own Perſon and Being: If, I ſay, upon a certain belief of this indication, the man ſhould appear over-joyed at the News, and be mightily tranſported with the diſcovery and expectation; would not all that ſaw him be aſtoniſhed at ſuch behaviour? Would they not be forward to conclude that the Diſtemper has ſeized him already, and

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that even then the miserable Creature was become a mere *Fool* and an Idiot? Now the Carriage of our *Atheists* or *Deists* is infinitely more amazing than this; no dotage so infatuate, no phrensie so extravagant as theirs. They have been educated in a *Religion*, that instructed them in the knowledge of a *Supreme Being*; a Spirit most excellently glorious, superlatively Powerfull and Wise and Good, Creator of all things out of nothing; That hath endued the Sons of Men, his peculiar Favorites, with a Rational Spirit, and hath placed them as Spectators in this noble Theatre of the World, to view and applaud these glorious Scenes of Earth and Heaven, the workmanship of his hands; That hath furnished them in general with a sufficient store of all things, either necessary or convenient for life; and particularly to such as fear and obey him, hath promised a supply of all wants, a deliverance and protection from dangers: *That they that seek him, shall want no manner of thing that is good.* And besides his munificence to them in this life; He *so loved the world, that he sent his Onely-begotten Son*, the express Image of his Substance, and Partaker of his eternal Nature and Glory, to *bring Life and Immortality to light*, and to tender them to Mankind upon fair and gracious Terms; That if they submitted to his *easie yoke and light burthen*, and observed his Commandments *which*

Psal. 34. 9.

Joh. 3. 16.

2 Tim. 1. 10.

Matt. 11. 30.

are

are not grievous; He then gave them *the promise of eternal Salvation*; He had *reserved for them in Heaven an Inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away*; He had *prepared* for them an unspeakable, unconceivable Perfection of Joy and Bliss, *things that eye had not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entred into the heart of man.* What a delightfull and ravishing *Hypothesis* of Religion is this? And in this Religion they have had their Education. Now let us suppose some great Professor in Atheism to suggest to some of these; That all this is a mere dream and imposture; that there is no such excellent Being, as they suppose, that created and preserves them; that all about them is dark senseless Matter, driven on by the blind impulses of Fatality and Fortune; that men first sprung up, like Mushroms, out of the mud and slime of the Earth; and that all their Thoughts, and the whole of what they call Soul, are only various Action and Repercussion of small particles of Matter, kept a-while a moving by some Mechanism and Clock-work, which finally ceases and perishes by death. If it be true then (as we daily find it is) that they listen with complacency to these horrid Suggestions; if they let go their hope of Everlasting Life with willingness and joy; if they entertain the thoughts of final Perdition with exultation and triumph; ought they not to be esteem'd most

1 Joh. 5. 3. Heb. 5. 9. 1 Pet. 1. 4. 1 Cor. 2. 9.

notori-

Ἄθεον καὶ ἄλογον καὶ ἀναίσθητον νοῦ. Max. Tyr. *Diss.* 1.

notorious *Fools*, even destitute of common sence, and abandon'd to a callousness and numbness of Soul?

2 Tim. 4. 8. Jam. 1. 12. 2 Cor. 4. 17.

What then, Is Heaven it self with its *pleasures for evermore* to be parted with so unconcernedly? Is a *Crown of Righteousness*, a *Crown of Life*, to be surrendred with laughter? Is an *exceeding and eternal weight of Glory*, too light in the balance against the hopeless death of the Atheist, and utter extinction? 'Twas a noble saying of the Emperor *Marcus*, That he would not endure to live one day in the world, if he did not believe it to be under the government of Providence. Let us but imagin that excellent Person confuted and satisfied by some *Epicurean* of his time; that all was but *Atoms*, and *Vacuum*, and *Necessity*, and *Chance*. Would He have been so pleased and delighted with the conviction? would He have so triumph'd in being overcome? or rather, as he hath told us, would he not have gon down with sorrow and despair to the grave? Did I but once see an Atheist lament and bewail himself; That upon a strict and impartial examination he had found to his cost, that all was a mistake; that the Prerogative of Human Nature was vanished and gone; those glorious hopes of Immortality and Bliss, nothing but cheating Joys and pleasant Delusions; that he had undone himself by losing the comfortable

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Error, and would give all the World to have better arguments for Religion: there would be great hopes of prevailing upon ſuch an Atheiſt as this. But, alas! there are none of them of this temper of mind; there are none that *underſtand and ſeek after God*; they have *no knowledge*, nor any deſire of inſtruction; they *thruſt the Word of God from them, and judge themſelves unworthy of everlaſting life*; they willingly preferr Darkneſs before Light; and obſtinately chooſe to periſh for ever in the Grave, rather than be Heirs of Salvation in the Reſurrection of the Juſt. Theſe certainly are the *Fools* in the Text, indocil, intractable Fools, whoſe ſtolidity can baffle all arguments, and is proof againſt Demonſtration it ſelf; *whoſe end* (as the words of St. *Paul* do truly deſcribe them) *whoſe end is deſtruction*, an eternal Deprivation of Being; *whoſe God is their belly*, the gratification of ſenſual Luſts; *whoſe Glory is in their ſhame*, in the debaſing and villainizing of Mankind to the condition of Beaſts; *who mind earthly things*, who if (like that great Apoſtle) they were *caught up to the third Heaven*, would (as the Spies did of *Canaan*) *bring down an evil report* of thoſe Regions of Bliſs. And I fear, unleſs it pleaſe God by extraordinary methods *to help their unbelief, and enlighten the eyes of their underſtanding*; they will carry their Atheiſm with them to the Pit, and the flames of Hell only muſt convince them of their Error.

v. 2. of this Pſalm. ver. 4. Act. 13. 46. Phil. 3. 19. 2 Cor. 12. 2. Num. 13. 32. Mar. 9. 24. Eph. 1. 19.

This supine and inconsiderate behaviour of the Atheists is so extremely absurd, that it would be deem'd incredible, if it did not occurr to our daily Observation; it proclaims aloud, that they are not led astray by their Reasoning, but led captive by their Lusts to the denial of God. When the very pleasures of Paradise are contemn'd and trampled on, like Pearls cast before Swine; there's small hope of reclaiming them by Arguments of Reason. But however, as *Solomon* adviseth, we will answer these
Prov. 26. 4 *Fools not according to their Folly, lest we also be like unto them.* It is expedient that we *put to silence the ignorance of these foolish men*, that Believers may be the more confirmed and more resolute in the Faith.

Did Religion bestow Heaven without any terms or conditions indifferently upon all; if the *Crown of Life* was hereditary and free to Good and Bad; and not settled by Covenant upon the Elect of God only, such as *live soberly and righteously and godly in this*
Tit. 2. 12. *present World*, I believe there would be no such thing as an Infidel among us. And without controversie, 'tis the Way and Means of attaining to Heaven, that makes profane Scorners so willingly let go the Expectation of it. 'Tis not the Articles of the Creed, but the Duty to God and their Neighbour, that is such an inconsistent incredible Legend. They will not practise the Rules of Religion, and therefore they

they cannot believe the Promises and Rewards of it.

But however let us suppose them to have acted like rational and serious Men: and perhaps upon a diligent inquisition they have found, that the Hope of immortality deserves to be *joyfully* quitted, and that either out of *Interest* or *Necessity* which is both.

I. And first, One may conceive indeed, how there might possibly be a *necessity* of quitting it. It might be tied to such Terms, as would render it impossible ever to be obtain'd. For example, if it should be required of all the Candidates of Glory and Immortality, to give a full and knowing Assent to such things as are repugnant to Common Sense, as contradict the κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι, the universal Notions and indubitable Maxims of Reason: if they were to believe, that One and the same Thing may *be* and *not be* at the same time and in the same respect; If allowing the received Idea's and denominations of Numbers and Figures and Body, they must seriously affirm, that Two and two do make a Dozen, or that the Diameter of a Circle is as long as the Circumference, or that *the same Body may be all of it in distant places at once.* I must confess that the offers of Happiness upon such Articles of Belief as these, would be mere tantalizing of Rational Creatures; and the Kingdom of Heaven would become the Inheritance of only Idots and Fools. For whilst a man of Com-

mon Capacity doth think and reflect upon ſuch Propoſitions; he cannot poſſibly bribe his Underſtanding to give a Verdict for their Truth. So that he would be quite fruſtrated of the Hope of Reward, upon ſuch unpracticable Conditions as theſe: neither could he have any evidence of the Reality of the Promiſe, ſuperiour to what he is conſcious to of the Falſity of the Means. Now if any Atheiſt can ſhew me in the Syſtem of Chriſtian Religion any ſuch abſurdities and repugnancies to our natural Faculties; I will either evince them to be Interpolations and Corruptions of the Faith, or yield my ſelf a Captive and a Proſelyte to his Infidelity.

II. Or, 2dly, they may think 'tis the *Intereſt* of Mankind, that there ſhould be no Heaven at all; becauſe the Labour to acquire it is more worth than the Purchaſe: God Almighty (if there be one) having much overvalued the Bleſſings of his Preſence. So that upon a fair eſtimation, 'tis a greater advantage to take one's ſwing in Senſuality, and have a glut of Voluptuouſneſs in this life, freely reſigning all pretences to future Happineſs, (which, when a man is once extinguiſh'd by Death, he cannot be ſuppoſed either to want or deſire) than to be tied up by Commandments and Rules ſo thwart and contrary to Fleſh and Bloud; to *take up one's Croſs, to deny himſelf*, and refuſe the Satisfaction of Natu-

Mark 8. 34.

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ral Deſires. This indeed is the true Language of Atheiſm, and the Cauſe of it too. Were not this at the bottom, no man in his wits could contemn and ridicule the expectation of Immortality. Now what power or influence can Religion have upon the minds of theſe men; while not only their Affections and Luſts, but their ſuppoſed Intereſt ſhall plead againſt it? But if we can once ſilence this powerfull Advocate, we ſhall without much difficulty carry the Cauſe at the Bar of impartial Reaſon.

Now here is a notorious inſtance of the *Folly* of Atheiſts, that while they repudiate all Title to the Kingdom of Heaven, merely for the preſent Pleaſure of Body, and their boaſted Tranquillity of Mind; beſides the extreme madneſs in runing ſuch a deſperate Hazard after Death, (which I will not now treat of) they unwittingly deprive themſelves here of that very Pleaſure and Tranquillity they ſeek for. For I ſhall now endeavour to ſhew, That Religion it ſelf gives us the greateſt Delights and Advantages even in this Life alſo, though there ſhould prove in the event to be no Reſurrection to another. *Her ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace.* Prov. 3. 17.

But before I begin that, I muſt occurr to one ſpecious Objection both againſt this Propoſition and the paſt part of my diſcourſe; Namely, that Religi-

Religion doth perpetually haunt and diſquiet us with diſmal apprehenſions of everlaſting Burnings in Hell; and that there is no ſhelter nor refuge from thoſe Fears, but behind the Principles of Atheiſm.

(1.) Firſt therefore I will freely acknowledge to the Atheiſts; that ſome part of what hath been ſaid is not directly concluſive againſt them; if they ſay, that before they revolted from the Faith, they had ſinned away all expectation of ever arriving at Heaven: and conſequently had good reaſon ſo *joyfully* to receive the news of Annihilation by Death, as an advantageous change for the everlaſting torments of the Damn'd. But becauſe I cannot expect that they will make ſuch a ſhameleſs and ſenſeleſs Confeſſion, and ſupply us with that invincible argument againſt themſelves: I muſt ſay again, that to preferr final Extinction before a happy Immortality does declare the moſt deplorable ſtupidity of mind. Nay although they ſhould confeſs, that they believed themſelves to be Reprobates, before they disbelieved Religion; and took Atheiſm as a ſanctuary and refuge from the Terrors of Hell, yet ſtill the Imputation of *Folly* will ſtick upon them: in as much as they choſe Atheiſm as an Opiate to ſtill thoſe frightening Apprehenſions, by inducing a dulneſs and lethargy of mind; rather than to make uſe of that active and ſalutary medicine, a hearty

hearty Repentance; that they did not know the *Riches of the goodness and forbearance and long-suffering of God*, and that a sincere Amendment of Life, was never too late nor in vain; *Jesus Christ being the Saviour of all men*, and a *propitiation for the sins of the whole world: who came into the world to save sinners, even the chief of them all; and died for the ungodly, and his bitterest enemies.* Rom. 2. 4. 1 Tim. 4. 10. 1 Joh. 5. 14. 1 Tim. 1 15. Rom. 5. 6, 10.

(2.) And secondly, As to the *Fears of Damnation*; those Terrors are not to be charged upon Religion it self, which proceed either from the Want of Religion, or Superstitious mistakes about it. For as an honest and innocent Man doth know the punishments, which the Laws of his Country denounce against Felons and Murtherers and Traytors, without being terrified or concern'd at them: So a Christian in truth as well as in name, though he believe the consuming Vengeance prepared for the disobedient and unbelievers, is not at all dismayed at the apprehensions of it. Indeed it adds spurs, and gives wings to his diligence, it excites him to *work out his salvation with fear and trembling*; a religious and ingenuous fear, that is temper'd with hope and with love and unspeakable joy. But he knows, that if he fears him who is *able to destroy both soul and body in Hell*, he needs not fear that his own soul or body shall ever go thither. Phil. 2. 12. Matt. 10. 28.

I allow

I allow that ſome debauched and profligate Wretches, or ſome deſigning perfidious Hypocrites, that are religious in outward profeſſion, but *corrupt and abominable* in their works, are moſt juſtly as well as uſually liable to theſe horrours of mind. 'Tis not my buſineſs to defend or excuſe ſuch as theſe; I muſt leave them, as long as they keep their *hardneſs and impenitent hearts*, to thoſe gnawing and excruciating Fears, thoſe whips of the Divine *Nemeſis*, that frequently ſcourge even Atheiſts themſelves: For they alſo can never wholly extinguiſh theſe horrible foreboadings of Conſcience. A thouſand occaſions do awake the ſleeping Tormentors. Any ſlight Conſideration either of themſelves, or of any thing without; whatſoever they think on, or whatſoever they look on; all do adminiſter ſome reaſons for ſuſpicion and diffidence, leſt poſſibly they may be in the wrong; and then 'tis a *fearfull thing to fall into the hands of the living God*: *There are they in great fear*, as 'tis in the 5th. verſe of this *Pſalm*, under terrible preſages of *judgment and fiery indignation*. Neither can they ſay, That theſe Terrors, like Tales about Spectres, may diſturb ſome ſmall Pretenders and puny Novices, but dare not approach the *vere Adepti*, the Maſters and Rabbies of Atheiſm. For 'tis well known both from ancient and modern Experience, that the very boldeſt of them out of their

Heb. 10. 31.

Verſ. 27.

Cic. Plutarch, &c.

their Debauches and Company, when they chance to be ſurpriſed with Solitude or Sickneſs, are the moſt ſuſpicious and timorous and deſpondent Wretches in the world: and that the boaſted Happy Atheiſt in the Indolence of body, and an undiſturbed Calm and Serenity of mind, is altogether as rare a Creature, as the *Vir Sapiens* was among the *Stoicks*; whom they often met with in Idea and Deſcription, in Harangues and in Books, but freely own'd that he never had or was like to exiſt actually in Nature.

And now as to the preſent advantages, which we owe to *Religion*, they are very conſpicuous; whether we conſider Mankind (1.) *Separately*, or (2.) under *Society* and *Government*.

1. And firſt, in a *Single Capacity*. How is a good Chriſtian animated and cheer'd by a ſtedfaſt belief of the Promiſes of the Goſpel; of an everlaſting enjoyment of perfect Felicity, ſuch as after millions of millions of Ages is ſtill youthfull and flouriſhing and inviting as at the firſt? no wrinkles in the face, no gray hairs on the head of Eternity; no end, no diminution, no ſatiety of thoſe delights. What a warm and vigorous influence does a Religious heart feel from a firm expectation of theſe Glories? Certainly this Hope alone is of ineſtimable value; 'tis a kind of anticipation and

pledge of those Joys; and at least gives him one Heaven upon Earth, though the other should prove a Delusion. Now what are the mighty promises of Atheism? let us know the glorious Recompences it proposeth; Utter Extinction and Cessation of Being; to be reduced to the same condition, as if we never had been born. O dismal reward of Infidelity! at which Nature does shrink and shiver with horror. What some of the * Learnedest Doctors among the *Jews* have esteem'd the most dreadfull of all Punishment, and have assigned for the portion of the blackest Criminals of the Damn'd; so interpreting *Tophet*, *Abaddon*, *the Vale of Slaughter*, and the like, for final Excision and Deprivation of Being: this Atheism exhibits to us, as an Equivalent to Heaven. We all know what hath been disputed among Schoolmen to this effect. And 'tis an observation of *Plutarch*, that the Generality of mankind πάντες ἄ, πᾶσαι, as well Women as Men, chose rather to endure all the Punishments of Hell, as described by the Poets; than part with the Hope of Immortality, though immortal only in misery, I easily grant, that this would be a very hard Bargain; and that *Not to be at all*, is more eligible, than *to be miserable always*: our Saviour himself having determin'd the question; *Wo to that man, by whom the Son of Man is betrayed; good were*

* *Vide* Pocockii *Notas ad Portam* Mosis, *p.* 158, &c.

Plutarc. Ὅτι οὐδὲ ζῆν, &c. *p.* 1104, 1105 Ed. Ruald.

Mark 14. 2.

were it for that man, if he had never been born. But however thus much it evidently shews, That this desire of Existence is a natural Affection of the Soul; 'tis *Self-preservation* in the highest and truest meaning; 'tis interwoven in the very Frame and Constitution of Man. How then can the Atheist reflect on his own *Hypothesis* without extreme sorrow and dejection of Spirit? Will he say, that when once he is dead, this Desire will be nothing; and that he that is not, cannot lament his Annihilation? So indeed it will be according to his Principles. But notwithstanding, while he continues in Life (which we now speak of) this dusky Scene of Horror, this melancholy Prospect of final Perdition will frequently occurr to his Fancy; the sweetest Enjoyments of Life will often become flat and insipid, will be damp'd and extinguish'd, be bitter'd and poison'd by the malignant and venomous quality of this Opinion.

Is it not more comfortable to a Man, to think well of himself, to have a high Value and Conceit of the Dignity of his Nature, to believe a noble Origination of his Race, the Off-spring and Image of the great King of Glory: rather than that men first proceeded, as Vermin are thought to doe, by the sole influence of the Sun out of Dirt and Putrefaction?

Is it not a firmer foundation for Contentment

and Tranquillity, to believe that All things were at firſt created, and are continually order'd and diſpoſed for the Beſt, and that principally for the Benefit and Pleaſure of Man; than that the whole Univerſe is mere bungling and blundering; no Art or Contrivance to be ſeen in't; nothing effected for any purpoſe and deſign; but all ill-favouredly cobled and jumbled together by the unguided agitation and rude ſhuffles of Matter?

Can any man wiſh a better Support under affliction, than the Friendſhip and Favour of Omnipotence, of Infinite Wiſedom and Goodneſs; who is both able, and willing, and knows how to relieve him? Such a man *can doe all things through Chriſt that ſtrengtheneth him*, he can patiently ſuffer all things with cheerfull ſubmiſſion and reſignation to the Divine Will. He has a ſecret Spring of ſpiritual Joy, and the continual Feaſt of a good Conſcience within, that forbid him to be miſerable. But what a forlorn deſtitute Creature is the Atheiſt in Diſtreſs? He hath no friend in Extremity, but Poiſon or a Dagger or a Halter or a Precipice. A violent Death is the laſt refuge of the *Epicureans*, as well as the *Stoicks*. This, ſays *Lucretius*, is the diſtinguiſhing Character of a genuine Son of our Sect, that he will not endure to live in Exile and Want and Diſgrace, out of a vain fear of death; but

Phil. 4. 13.

Lib. 3.

diſpatch

diſpatch himſelf reſolutely into the State of eternal Sleep and Inſenſibility. And yet for all this ſwaggering, not one of a hundred hath boldneſs enough to follow the Direction. The baſe and degenerous ſaying of one of them is very well known; *That *Life* is always *ſweet*, and he ſhould ſtill deſire to prolong it; though after he had been maim'd and diſtorted by the Rack, he ſhould laſtly be condemn'd to hang on a Gibbet.

* Mecænas *apud* Senec. *Ep.* 101. *Debilem facito Manu; debilem pede coxa: &c.*

And then, as to the *Practical Rules* and Duties of Religion: as the Miracles of our Lord are peculiarly eminent above the *Lying Wonders* of *Dæmons*, in that they were not made out of vain Oſtentation of Power, and to raiſe unprofitable Amazement; but for the real Benefit and Advantage of men, by feeding the Hungry, healing all ſorts of Diſeaſes, ejecting of Devils, and reviving the Dead: ſo likewiſe the Commands which he hath impoſed on his Followers are not like the abſurd Ceremonies of *Pagan* Idolatry, the frivolous Rites of their Initiations and Worſhip, that might look like Incantation and Magick, but had no tendency in their Nature to make Mankind the happier. Our Saviour hath enjoyn'd us a *Reaſonable ſervice*, accommodated to the rational part of our Nature. All his Laws are in themſelves, abſtracted from any Conſideration of Recompence, conducible to the Temporal Intereſt of them

Rom. 12. 1.

that

that observe them. For what can be more availing to a Man's Health, or his Credit, or Estate, or Security in this world, than Charity and Meekness, than Sobriety and Temperance, than Honesty and Diligence in his Calling? Do not Pride and Arrogance infallibly meet with Contempt? Do not Contentiousness and Cruelty and Study of Revenge seldom fail of Retaliation? Are not Envious and Covetous, Discontented and Anxious minds tormenters to themselves? Do not we see, that Slothfull and Intemperate and Incontinent persons destroy their Bodies with diseases, their Reputations with disgrace, and their Families with want? Are Adultery and Fornication forbidden only by *Moses* and *Christ*? or do not *Heathen* Law-givers punish such Enormities with Fines, or Imprisonment, with Exile, or Death? 'Twas an objection of *Julian* the Apostate; that there were no new Precepts of Morality in our Religion: *Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife.* Why all the World, says he, is agreed about these Commandments: and in every Country under Heaven, there are Laws and Penalties made to enforce all the Ten, excepting only the *Sabbath* and *the Worship of strange Gods*. We can answer *him* another way; but he may make our Infidels ashamed to complain of those Ordinances as hard Impositions, which the sense of all Nations has thought

Julianus *apud* Cyrillum, *p.* 134.

thought to be reasonable: which not only the Philosophers of *Greece* and *Italy* and the ancient World; but the Banyans of *Mogul*, the Talapoins of *Siam*, the Mandarins of *China*, the Moralists of *Peru* and *Mexico*, all the Wisdom of Mankind have declared to be necessary Duties. Nay, if the Atheists would but live up to the Ethicks of *Epicurus* himself, they would make few or no Proselytes from the Christian Religion. None revolt from the Faith for such things as are thought peculiar to Christianity; Not because they must *love and pray for their enemies*, but because they must not poison or stab them: not because they must not *look upon a Woman to lust after her*, but because they are much more restrain'd from the Perpetration of their Lusts. If wanton glances and libidinous thoughts had been permitted by the Gospel, they would have apostatized nevertheless. This we may conjecture from what *Plato* and others have told us, that it was commonly ἀκρασία ἡδονῶν καὶ ὀπιθυμιῶν, their immoderate Affections and Lusts, that in the very times of Paganism induced men to be Atheists. It seems their impure and brutal Sensuality was too much confined by the Religion of *those* Countries, where even *Venus* and *Bacchus* had their Temples. Let not therefore voluptuous Atheists lay all the fault of their Sins upon the Infirmity of Human Nature; nor plead that Flesh and Blood

Matt. 5. 44.

ver. 28.

Plato *de Legibus*, *lib.* 10. *p.* 886. *Ed.* Step.

cannot

cannot reſiſt thoſe Temptations, which have all their force and prevalence from long Cuſtom and inveterated Habit. What enticement, what pleaſure is there in common profane Swearing? yet neither the fear of God nor of the Law will perſuade men to leave it. 'Tis prevailing Example that hath now made it faſhionable, but it hath not always been ſo, nor will be hereafter. So other Epidemical Vices, they are rife and predominant only for a ſeaſon, and muſt not be aſcribed to Human Nature in the Lump. In ſome Countries Intemperance is a neceſſary part of Converſation; in others Sobriety is a Vertue Univerſal, without any reſpect to the Duties of Religion. Nor can they ſay, that this is only the difference of Climate, that inclines one Nation to Concupiſcence and Senſual Pleaſures; another to Bloud-thirſtineſs and Deſire of Revenge. It would diſcover great ignorance in Hiſtory, not to know that in all Climates a whole People has been over-run with ſome recently invented or newly imported kind of Vice, which their Grandfathers never knew. In the lateſt Accounts of the Country of *Guiana*, we are told that the eating of Human Fleſh is the beloved pleaſure of thoſe Savages: two Nations of them by mutual devouring are reduced to two handfulls of men. When the Goſpel of our Saviour was preached to them, they received it with gladneſs

gladness of heart; they could be brought to forego Plurality of Wives; though that be the main impediment to the conversion of the *East-Indies*. But the great Stumbling-block with these *Americans*, and the only Rock of Offence was, the forbidding them *to eat their Enemies*: That irresistable Temptation made them quickly to revolt and relapse into their Infidelity. What, must we impute this to the temperature of the Air, to the nature of the Soil, to the influence of the Stars? Are these *Barbarians* of man-eating Constitutions, that they so hanker after this Diet, which we cannot imagin without horror? Is not the same thing practised in other parts of that Continent? Was it not so in *Europe* of old, and is it not now so in *Africa*? If an Eleventh Commandment had been given, *Thou shalt not eat Human flesh*; would not these Canibals have esteem'd it more difficult than all the Ten? And would not they have really had as much reason as our Atheists, to plead the Power of the Temptation, and the propensity of Flesh and Blood? how impudent are they then, that traduce the easie and gracious Conditions of the Gospel for unreasonable and Tyrannical Impositions? *Are not God's ways equal*, O ye Children of Destruction, *and are not your ways unequal?*

II. Secondly and lastly, As to the benign Influence of Religion upon *Communities* and Goverments,

habemus confitentes Reos; 'tis so apparent and unquestionable, that 'tis one of the wise Objections of the Atheist, That it first was contrived and introduced by Politicians to bring the wild and stragling Herds of Mankind under Subjection and Laws. *Out of thy own mouth shalt thou be judged, thou wicked servant.*

Luk. 19. 22.

Thou say'st that the wisest Institutors of Government, Souls elevated above the ordinary pitch of men, thought Religion necessary to Civil Obedience. Why then dost thou endeavour to undermine this foundation, to undo this Cement of Society, and to reduce all once again to thy imaginary State of Nature and Original Confusion? No Community ever was or can be begun or maintain'd, but upon the Basis of Religion. What Government can be imagin'd without Judicial Proceedings? and what methods of Judicature without a Religious Oath; which implies and supposes an Omniscient Being, as conscious to its falshood or truth, and a revenger of Perjury? So that the very nature of an Oath (and therefore of Society also) is subverted by the Atheist; who professeth to acknowledge nothing superiour to himself, no omnipresent observer of the actions of men. For an * Atheist to compose a *System* of *Politicks* is as absurd and ridiculous, as *Epicurus*'s Sermons were about † *Sanctity* and *Religious Worship*. But there was hope, that the Doctrine of absolute uncon-

* Hobbes *de Cive, Leviathan.*

† Περὶ Ὁσιότητος, Laert. *De sanctitate & pietate adversus Deos*, Cic.

uncontroulable Power and the formidable name of *Leviathan* might flatter and bribe the Government into a *toleration of Infidelity*. We need have no recourse to notion and supposition; we have sad experience and convincing example before us, what a rare Constitution of Government may be had in a whole Nation of Atheists. The Natives of *Newfoundland* and *New France* in *America*, as they are *said* to live without any sense of Religion, so they are *known* to be destitute of its advantages and blessings; without any Law or form of Community; without any Literature or Sciences or Arts; no Towns, no fixed Habitations, no Agriculture, no Navigation. And 'tis entirely owing to the power of Religion, that the whole World is not at this time as barbarous as they. And yet I ought not to have called these miserable Wretches *a Nation of Atheists*. They cannot be said to be of the Atheist's opinion, because they have no opinion at all in the matter: They do not say in their hearts, *There is no God*; for they never once deliberated, if there was one or no. They no more *deny* the existence of a Deity, than they deny the *Antipodes*, the *Copernican System*, or the *Satellites Jovis*: about which they have had no notion nor conception at all. 'Tis the *Ignorance* of those poor Creatures, and not their *Impiety*: *their* Ignorance as much to be pitied, as the Impiety of the *Atheists* is to be

De Laet. *p.* 34, 47, 50. *Voyage du Sieur de Champlain. p.* 28, & 93.

detested and punish'd. 'Tis of mighty importance to the Government, to put some timely stop to the spreading Contagion of this *Pestilence that walketh by day*, that dares to disperse its cursed seeds and principles in the face of the Sun. The *Fool* in the Text had only said *in his heart, There is no God:* he had not spoken it aloud, nor openly blasphem'd in places of publick resort. There's too much reason to fear, that some of all orders of men, even Magistracy it self, have taken the Infection: a thing of dreadfull consequence and most imminent danger. *Epicurus* was *not a little* wiser than ordinary, when he so earnestly advised his Disciples against medling in publick affairs; He knew the nature and tendency of his own Philosophy; that it would soon become suspected and odious to a Government, if ever Atheists were employed in places of Trust. But because he had made one great Rule superiour to all, *That every man's only Good was pleasure of Body and contentment of Mind:* hence it was that men of ambitious and turbulent Spirits, that were dissatisfied and uneasie with Privacy and Retirement, were allowed by his own Principle to engage in matters of State. And there they generally met with that fortune, which their Master foresaw. Several Cities of *Greece* that had made experiment of them in Publick Concerns, drove them out, as Incendiaries and Pests of Commonweals, by

Plutarch. Λάθε βιώσας. Lucr. &c.

Plutarch. Ὅτι οὐδὲ ἡδέως ζῆν. Cic. &c.

by ſevere Edicts and Proclamations. Atheiſm is by no means tolerable in the moſt private condition: but if it aſpire to authority and power; if it acquire the Command of an Army or a Navy; if it get upon the Bench or into the Senate, or on a Throne: what then can be expected, but the baſeſt Cowardiſe and Treachery, but the fouleſt prevarication in Juſtice, but betraying and ſelling the Rights and Liberties of a People, but arbitrary Government and tyrannical Oppreſſion? Nay, if Atheiſm were once, as I may ſay, the National Religion; it would make its own Followers the moſt miſerable of men; it would be the Kingdom of Satan divided againſt it ſelf; and the Land would be ſoon brought to deſolation. *Joſephus*, that knew them, hath inform'd us, that the Sadducees, thoſe Epicureans among the Jews, were not only rough and cruel to men of a different Sect from their own; but perfidious and inhumane one towards another. This is the genuine ſpirit and the natural product of Atheiſm. No man, that adheres to that narrow and ſelfiſh Principle, can ever be Juſt or Generous or Gratefull; * unleſs he be ſometime overcome by Good-nature and a happy Conſtitution. No Atheiſt, as ſuch, can be a true Friend, an affectionate Relation, or a loyal Subject. The appearance and ſhew of mutual Amity among them, is wholly owing to the

Joſephus, *de Bello Judaico, l. 2. c. 12.*

* *Si ſibi ipſe conſentiat, & non interdum naturæ bonitate vincatur.* Cic. *de Offic.* 12.

the ſmallneſs of their number, and to the obligations of a Faction. 'Tis like the Friendſhip of Pick-pockets and High-way Men, that are ſaid to obſerve ſtrict Juſtice among themſelves, and never to defraud a Comrade of his ſhare of the Booty. But if we could imagin a whole Nation to be Cut-purſes and Robbers; would there then be kept that ſquare-dealing and equity in ſuch a monſtrous *den of Thieves*? And if Atheiſm ſhould be ſuppoſed to become univerſal in this Nation (which ſeems to be deſign'd and endeavour'd, though we know the gates of Hell ſhall not be able to prevail) farewell all Ties of Friendſhip and Principles of Honour; all Love for our Country and Loyalty to our Prince; nay, farewell all Government and Society it ſelf, all Profeſſions and Arts, and Conveniences of Life, all that is laudable or valuable in the world.

And now having in the firſt place explained the Words of the *Text*, and ſecondly detected the mere *Deiſts* of our Age to be no better than diſguiſed *Atheiſts* (ſeeing they have now no pretence to the Deiſm of *Epicurus*;) and afterwards having ſhown, that willingly to entertain the *Hypotheſis of Atheiſm* (which is literally *to chooſe Death and Evil before Life and Good*, and *to love Darkneſs rather than Light*) is the moſt abſurd and inconſiderate *Folly*; and that there is nothing to excuſe ſo ſilly a Choice: Not any

Deut. 30. 15.
Joh. 3. 10.

any *Necessity* of it; for Religion doth not impose any Articles of Faith that are repugnant to our Faculties, and incredible to Natural Reason: Not *Interest*; because Religion it self is even in this Present Life the truest and best Interest as well of every *single Person* (for a Christian's Belief is the most comfortable, and his Hope the most glorious of all Men's, and the Practical Duties he is obliged to, are in themselves agreeable to his Nature, and conducible to his Temporal Happiness) as of *Communities and Governments*; because Religion is not only usefull to Civil Society, but fundamentally necessary to its very Birth and Constitution: Having, I say, competently proved these Particulars, as far as the usual brevity of such Discourses will allow; I shall conclude all with one short Reflection, That if *Atheism* or modern *Deism* be evinced to be *Folly*, how great must that *Folly* be? It must not be bare *Folly*, but *Madness* and *Distraction*. Nor do we need to recurr to the *Stoical* Paradox, *That all Fools are mad*; Nor to that Saying of one of their own Party, (not out of Derision, as some would have it, but out of Complement to the Publick) call'd it *Insanientem sapientiam*, the *Mad* Philosophy of Atheism. For so sottishly to lose the purest Pleasures and Comforts of *this* World, and forego the expectation of Immortality

tality in *another*; and so desperately to run the Risk of *dwelling with everlasting Burnings*, it plainly discovers it self to be what it is; it is manifestly the most pernicious *Folly* and deplorable *Madness* in the World.

May the Father of Mercies and God of Infinite Wisedom reduce the Foolish *from their Errors, and make them* wise unto Salvation; *Confirm the Sceptical and wavering Minds, and so prevent Us, that stand fast, in all our doings, and further us with his continual help,* that we may not be of them that draw back unto Perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the Soul. *Amen.*

FINIS.